Forest Health Technical Advisory Committee

May 10, 2012

Central Washington University

Ellensburg, WA

10:03 am Aaron Everett called the meeting to order.

Introductions

Committee members present: Aaron Everett, Reese Lolley, Greg Morris, Bill Gaines, Robert Gara, Connie Mehmel, Morris Johnson, Scott Ketchum, and Doug Daoust.

Others present: Karen Ripley (DNR), Chuck Hersey (DNR), and Phil Hess (consulting forester, landowner).

Morris Johnson is sitting in for Dave Peterson.

10:00 – 10:15 Welcome, housekeeping, meeting notes

Aaron provided an overview of the agenda for the day. Committee members reviewed notes from April TAC meeting. Notes will be posted on DNR website. Committee members have until the end of the week to let Aaron know if they have any edits to the meeting notes.

Overview of Draft TAC Recommendations and Report for Warning Areas

Committee reviewed draft recommendations both at a landscape and stand scale. These recommendations are a very rough draft at this point and need substantial review and discussion.

-Review overall approach and data

-Refine/adjust overall approach and landscape-scale recommendations

-Identify/strengthen missing pieces

-individual warning consideration narrative/data

-fuels integration

-Refine/adjust stand-scale recommendations

-Additional recommendations

A map of the recommended forest health hazard warning areas was reviewed by the committee.

Committee reviewed forest health hazard warning area descriptions and management recommendations.

Landscape recommendations: vegetation condition class dataset was used to compare current vegetation conditions to historical reference conditions and develop estimates of departure for each major biophysical setting in the warning areas. Succession classes for each biophysical setting were summarized by forest health hazard warning area. This was summarized in a table entitled "Comparison of current forest conditions with historical reference conditions." This table compares the percentage of the landscape in current structural classes and compares to the reference condition structural classes.

Reese provided a description of how reference conditions were developed with VDDT models.

Morris said the state and transition models are not associated with any specific data so it provides a challenge for land managers to implement. Landscape level data needs to be adapted to site specific conditions.

Central Okanogan Warning Area Current and Historical Reference Conditions

Ponderosa Pine-Douglas Fir Biophysical Setting (BpS): The percentage of current closed mid-development and late development stands is much higher than the historical reference conditions. Based on the data there should be about 88,000 acres of Ponderosa Pine (PIPO)/Douglas-fir (PSME) in late development open and there is currently only 7,285 acres of late development open.

Ponderosa Pine BpS: Shows that a late development closed PIPO is over-represented compared to historical reference conditions. The committee has not specifically recommended a forest health warning for ponderosa pine. The committee discussed what recommendations would be for PIPO stands in light of the current condition data. Bob said that western pine beetle would be the most common damage agent in the future as the stands get older. Western pine beetle favors mature ponderosa pine and so it may become more of a problem in the future. Doug asked if there are any treatment differences between PIPO/PSME stands versus PIPO stands, if not then they could be considered the same. Aaron asked is there a difference in priority between PIPO/PSME stands and PIPO stands? Greg said it would be helpful to target resources to activities that will help to get out in front of a problem, make sure stands are healthy enough to respond to treatment.

Reese said there is some flexibility based on landowner objectives on how you move the PIPO BpS closer to historical reference conditions.

TAC recommends that PIPO BpS in Central Okanogan merits inclusion as an area of concern with a goal of 55% (approx. 38,000 acres) of PIPO BpS in late seral open.

Scott wonders if managing for historical reference vegetation conditions is the same as managing for forest health resiliency? The objective is to "move toward," leaving room for landowner decisions. Moving in that direction at the broad scale and then doing so within a range of sound stand-level practices would seem to assure resiliency as best can be measured with available information.

Doug said that in areas that don't qualify for a warning we could include climate change as a consideration. Recommendations should include considerations that will make forests better able to adapt to climate change.

Engelmann Spruce/Subalpine fir BpS: There is a large overrepresentation of open structure classes in this BpS compared to the historical reference conditions. Bill is concerned that the scale of only 40,000 acres of this BpS can skew things and make conclusions tenuous. The reference conditions are not as helpful with smaller acreages. Aaron suggested that looking at the reference conditions across the Methow and Okanogan might give a better perspective of the landscape conditions. This BpS is primarily DNR and USFS lands with management options defined largely by lynx and is currently primarily lodgepole pine. Does the committee want to set landscape level goals for this BpS or only stand level goals? Is lodgepole pine climax here because disturbance regime is frequent enough due to fire and drought and most of the landscape will not succeed to Engelmann spruce/subalpine fir? Bill Gaines said he is still struggling with how uncharacteristic the condition of lodgepole pine currently is in the area. Scott is leaning towards putting lodgepole pine as an area of concern rather than a warning. If we set a target for landscape conditions it may be in conflict with lynx habitat management obligations. Include in metadata description of differences between reference conditions and our desired conditions

Options for Lodgepole pine warning area:

-Continue to recommend as warning area

-Change recommendation to area of concern

-Use a different measure of landscape conditions other than historical reference conditions to set goals for the area.

Should lodgepole pine warning area be reclassified as an area of concern due to efficacy, lynx and ownership issues?

Bill: Yes

Connie: Yes

Doug: Unsure, does not want to change based on satellite imagery. Doug is concerned about changing methodology based on not liking the data.

Scott: recommends that we should reinvestigate current conditions. Reese recommended looking at cover type by biophysical setting. Scott recommends it as an area of concern.

Morris: believes that we should look at the data again.

Reese: believes it should be an area of concern.

Greg: does not have a problem doing a warning or area of concern. Wants to make sure we are using the best available data

Bob: is fine with doing an area of concern.

Summary: Further discussion of the available data, might not be a feasible way to establish a landscape target since the unit of scale for a "reference" landscape is going to be much larger than area we're considering. Available literature is scarce as to landscape resiliency to MPB in lodgepole, albeit much is available about site-level control methods. Remains functionally a single-landowner issue with efficacy constraints. Lodgepole pine in Central Okanogan will be reclassified as an area of concern.

Chuck will nevertheless dig further into BpS and reference condition definition questions, perhaps able to summarize Engelmann/subalpine fir BpS based on GNN, use stateclass for Central Okanogan area. Summarize cover types by Biophysical setting using Landfire cover type data.

East Okanogan/West Ferry County Hazard Warning Area

Ponderosa Pine-Douglas-Fir BpS: There is an under representation of late seral open for this BpS, there should be 147,000 acres of late seral open and there is only 9,520 acres.

Douglas-fir Interior Pacific Northwest BpS: There is an over representation of mid seral open for this BpS, there is currently 175,000 acres of mid seral open and there should be approx. 64,000 acres. There is an under-representation of late seral open. The committee discussed the description of structure classes in the BpS model.

Ponderosa Pine BpS: This landscape much of the PIPO is either late seral open or early seral, there is an over-representation early seral (40% current, vs. 10% reference condition). What happens when the early seral matures into mid seral closed? PIPO is primarily on the Colville Reservation in this landscape.

Engelmann spruce/Subalpine fir BpS: no issue here as no warning for lodgepole pine.

Landscape Recommendations

The desired result of a forest health hazard warning is to catalyze actions that build broad scale resiliency to uncharacteristically severe damage from the identified damage agents. The use of reference conditions is not recommended so as to subjugate individual landowners and managers objectives, but rather is to serve as a guide to judge progress toward broad based resiliency as outlined in state statute.

Morris said that we need to think about the current stand condition and the appropriate silvicultural pathway, sometimes there are intermediate treatments that are appropriate, other times regeneration treatments are the best strategy.

Scott says that people believe that un-even aged management is an appropriate way to manage interior Douglas-fir and it is not, there should be more even aged management.

Often need to treat both understory and overstory simultaneously.

There is often not a defined silvicultural pathway between current condition and desired condition. How do we deal with these situations in the recommendations? For example how do we go from mid seral open to late seral open?

Need to include how recommendations will impact fire behavior?

Bill Gaines asked if we want to go through some finer scale analysis to help prioritize treatments. Bill suggested TAC recommend collaboration between landowners to prioritize and implement treatments. Aaron said that will be incorporated as a landscape scale recommendation. With the finer scale analysis we could incorporate some climate change aspects. Bill said USFS is prioritizing treatments based on stand structure and proximity to damage agents.

Stand Level Recommendations

Budworm

Add recommendations for previously high-graded stands, difficult economic prospects, few silvicultural pathways in the near term; dwarf-mistletoe in overstory, starting over is sometimes the best option.

Connie said we should describe high risk conditions and recommendations that will reduce the risk. Connie said we could make the criteria for high risk clearer in the document.

Scott said there are some good extension publications on budworm.

Reese said there should be some superficial description of succession classes and what they look like on the ground. Need to reduce canopy layers and reduce canopy cover.

Are there guidelines on when to start over? Develop a one page factsheet. Paul Flanagan may have developed a handout and Connie will research this.

MPB in Lodgepole pine

Since it is now only an area of concern, do we need stand level recommendations? Condense recommendations and move to area of concern.

Small landowner (<10 acres) recommendations

Contact DNR and/or consulting foresters/arborists, professional assistance. Karen said that 10 acres was used as a cutoff because they are not held to the same recommendations as larger landowners. Greg recommended before and after photos to demonstrate recommendations. Aggregate landowners together into larger projects integrated with ongoing fuels/Firewise outreach.

Scientific, Recreation and Conservation Landowner Recommendations

Law specifies that separate recommendations are needed for this type of landowner. This is to distinguish management objectives so that overall recommendations would not apply to areas that couldn't comply with them.

Outreach and Implementation Recommendations

-Need to consult with professionals and county officials in the area before warning notices go out so they are prepared. This is included in the law.

-There will also need to be at least one public hearing in the affected area as well as each landowner in the area will be mailed an official notice and notice will be published in the local papers.

Environmental Risks and Alternatives

Describe silvicultural pathways, long-term nature of achieving desired conditions, describe negative consequences of no actions. Describe Values at Risk analysis (Priority Habitat and Species, salmonid stock inventory, CWPP/WUI, etc.).

Do we need to describe background on how we got to this situation (lack of management, lack of fire). Need an introduction to the overall uncharacteristic nature of the landscape and actions that have led to this. Describe the appropriate use and risks associated with fire as a potential management tool to improve forest health resiliency. Also potentially include integrated pest management strategies and other practices.

Aaron will solicit the advice of Dept. of Ecology and DFW members to see if they have any thoughts on this section

Other

Warning areas will be combined since they are both now for western spruce budworm only.

At the next meeting the TAC will consider the Klickitat WRIA for a forest health hazard warning determination. TAC reviewed forest management treatments for Klickitat WRIAs. There is a lot of active management in the Klickitat WRIA. There is a high level of risk, but the recent trend of pine bark beetle mortality is decreasing and there is very little budworm activity. A great deal of mortality is predicted in NIDRM and this coupled with few reserve areas is primarily to account for its high coarse-scale rating. We will do an analysis of current condition/historical reference condition (BpS) for Klickitat and analyze NIDRM models for Klickitat.

Reese said that we need analyze it carefully as it came out number one in our original analysis. Create maps of aerial survey damage from 2006 to 2011.

Next Meeting

Next meeting is scheduled for Monday, June 11 at 10 am at Central Washington University in Ellensburg.